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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 002894

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - Subject line

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/27/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION: CAMPAIGN CLOSES, CLOUDS AHEAD

REF: A. QUITO 2739
[1](#)B. QUITO 2625

Classified By: PolOff Erik Martini for reasons 1.4 (B&D)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: The early campaign days of free computers, colorful flags, dancing and humorous jibes are over. Ecuador now must decide between two populist candidates that have both gone negative. Ecuadorian voters also must digest Correa's allegations of fraud and the prospect of a closely contested election that may not have definitive results quickly after Election Day. The election remains too close to call. Correa is ahead by four points in the latest credible poll but a substantial undecided vote could move than even the score. Post-election demonstrations and challenges are very possible, but we believe there is a good chance that results, while slow coming, will be reliable. Suggested press guidance for the various scenarios appears below. End Summary.

Correa Ahead, Many Still Undecided

[12.](#) (SBU) In the latest Cedatos/Gallup poll conducted November 22, Rafael Correa leads Alvaro Noboa 52-48%, with a +/- 3% margin of error. Undecided voters fell slightly from November 14 from 22% to 17%. The poll surveyed voters in 18 of 22 provinces, urban and rural areas. Cedatos has conducted four polls since the first round on October 15th; the polls show a downward trend for Noboa and an upward trend for Correa.

Polling Gives Clues to Tendencies of Poor Voters

[13.](#) (SBU) Pollsters admit that they do not reach the most rural and poorest sectors of Ecuador. The eight poorest municipalities in Ecuador voted overwhelmingly for Gilmar Gutierrez in the first round. With Gutierrez out, those voters will have to choose between Noboa and Correa. According to a poll by Informe Confidencial, 42% of voters see Noboa as the candidate of the poor; only 29% think so of Correa. Noboa, however, is identified as one who can "change the situation of my family and me" by 33% to Correa's 25%. People surveyed think Noboa has a better housing plan than Correa by 50.5% to 29.2%. A study by the economic research firm Quantum Informe shows that Noboa's most popular proposals are those identified with job creation and health

improvement. According to this source, Correa's most popular proposals are "dismissing Congress" and reforming current oil contracts, themes he has not emphasized as much during the second round of the campaign.

¶4. (SBU) Voters seem to prefer friendship to conflict when considering the candidates' international affiliations. Being a "friend of the U.S." is judged one of the three best qualities of Alvaro Noboa, in the Quantum Informe study. Being an "enemy of Venezuela and Cuba," however, was considered by respondents to be one of Noboa's worst qualities. Being a "friend of Venezuela and Cuba," in contrast, was rated one of Correa's better qualities. Similarly, "opposing the U.S." was considered to be one of Correa's worst qualities.

Correa Alleges Fraud, Tells Voters to Protect Their Votes

¶5. (SBU) In closing campaign events and through surrogates in the media, Correa alleged that the electoral process is again rife with fraud. Claiming the first round was "stolen" from him, he told his supporters to use their own pens on election day, citing an alleged military intelligence report saying pens with disappearing ink would be distributed in the areas where Correa had the most support. Correa also criticized President Bush for the situation in Iraq.

¶6. (SBU) On November 23, Correa closed his campaign in Quito and then in Manabi province, telling supporters and reporters to "protect" their vote. Correa's campaign manager Gustavo Larrea declared "citizens will take care that their votes are not distorted." Correa's campaign announced plans to mobilize 100,000 volunteers to monitor the vote count at every voting table.

Noboa Meets Bishop, Quito and Guayaquil Mayors

¶7. (SBU) In an about-face from his defiant refusal to meet perceived power brokers (Ref A), Noboa met with Guayaquil mayor Jaime Nebot, Quito Mayor Paco Moncayo and Quito Catholic arch-bishop Raul Vela on November 22 and 23. Noboa expressed support for the mayors' decentralization bill in favor of municipalities, one of Nebot's pet projects which Moncayo has also supported. About his meeting with Moncayo, Noboa said he discussed subjects important to the city's citizens, such as public works, transportation and security. Noboa's visit with the arch-bishop was seen as an effort to overcome past criticism from the Catholic Church hierarchy (Ref B).

Comment

¶8. (C) Correa may have the momentum needed to carry him into office, but undercounted rural and undecided voters, and even Ecuadorians voting abroad could decide the final result. A very close result will cause uncertainty by preventing reliable results reporting from exit polls and quick counts. During the delay before official results (expected between November 28-31, both campaigns could try to show their strength in the streets (probably in different streets--Correa in Quito and Noboa in Guayaquil). If Noboa wins, Correa will likely call his supporters out to "protect the vote" claiming fraud. While the close results scenario is the most risky, it is not necessarily the most likely if undecided voters break overwhelmingly in one direction. In that scenario, the combination of media exit polling, unofficial quick counts, OAS observation, and TSE vote counting (results will be posted as they are counted on www.tse.gov.ec), should generate reliable results and help defuse post-electoral conflict.

Suggested Press Guidance

¶9. (SBU) Q: Any Comment on Ecuador's November 26

Presidential elections and accusations of electoral fraud?

A: The United States congratulates the People of Ecuador for exercising their democratic rights at the polls and for conducting peaceful elections.

A (If the OAS has not released a statement): We are awaiting the results of the OAS observation mission and look forward to reviewing their report.

A: (If the OAS has released a statement): The Organization of American States observation mission stated that, in general, the elections were free and fair. We look forward to reviewing their report.

Q: Does the U.S. agree with the preliminary results?

A: Votes are still being counted. We are looking forward to the final report of the Ecuadorian Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

Q: Will the apparent win by Correa/Noboa hurt or help U.S.-Ecuador relations?

A: The United States has traditionally enjoyed good relations with the government of Ecuador. We look forward to maintaining a positive, cooperative bilateral relationship with the next Ecuadorian government, consistent with our commitment to Ecuador's democratic institutions and the peace and security of its people.

Q: (If Correa wins) Are you concerned about Correa's ties to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez?

A: We respect the sovereign right of the government of Ecuador to build relations with any government it chooses.
JEWELL